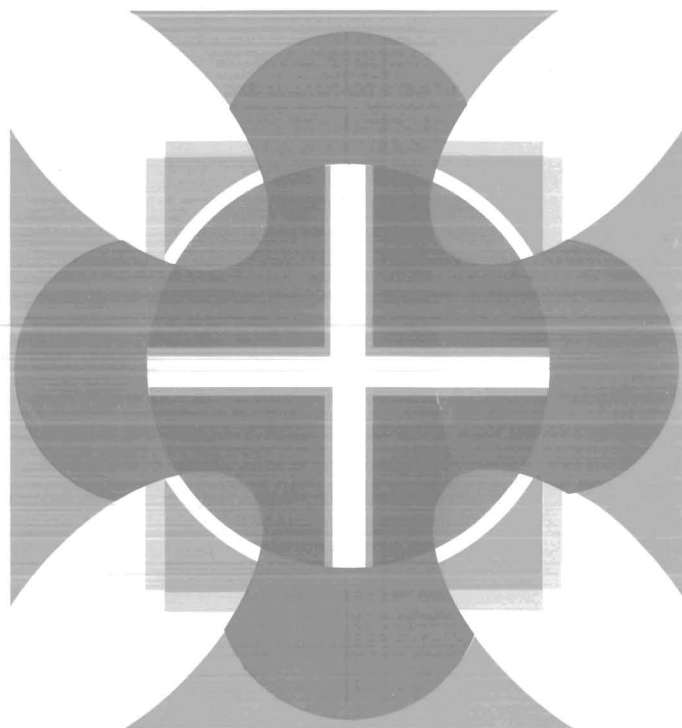


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HOMILETICS

There will be some who will note that not every Sunday is treated in this sequence from Holy Week to After Pentecost. But the optimists will be delighted with the stuff of it—both good and copious—and will proceed to stretch it out over the skipped days.

It is again a fascinating mixture—Jones, who doesn't think the pericopes should have been chosen in the first place, and von Rohr Sauer, who climbs up into the pulpit with Father Mapple to preach on Jonah and pulls the rope ladder up after him. When he comes down he walks with Ezekiel to the valley of the dry bones. Easter preaching may well take on new life this year! Deppe makes both Good Friday and Easter sing, and Damm and Volz speak with the Spirit who breathes new life even into the bones of sermon outlines. After reading Piepkorn many a preacher will resolve to do something about Ascension Day and will hesitate only in choosing the text with which to do it!

George W. Hoyer

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT: LAETARE

Isaiah 54:7-10

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Matthew 5:1-12

In the structure of Matthew's Gospel the text begins the first of five major discourses by means of which Jesus shapes the will and life of His disciples. Jesus had called His first disciples (4:18-22), traveled throughout Galilee (4:23) performing His threefold kingdom ministry (cf. 4:17) of teaching, preaching, and healing, so that His fame spread far and wide. Great crowds of people from all over Palestine thronged to Him (4:24-25). Jesus was at the peak of His popularity. This is the setting for the Sermon on the Mount.

V. 1: Here, as elsewhere, Matthew distinguishes between the "crowds" and "His disciples" (cf. Matt. 15:29 f.). Even though in full view of the crowds, Jesus is not speaking to them. He is teaching His disciples. This is not instruction on how one becomes a disciple, or Christian; but it is teaching for disciples on what their relationship to Christ means and involves. It is not a list of things a disciple must do to be rewarded, but a description of what he is by God's mercy and gifts. The Beatitudes are preface to Christ's interpretation of the Law (cf. Formula of Concord, SD V, 10). The Beatitudes furnish the Gospel perspective for the Christian's relation to the Law.

V. 3: "Blessed" (*makarios*, not *eulogetos*). In classical Greek it is generally associated with good fortune and happiness, particularly in earthly riches, in social position, in honors, in family and friends. The verb, *makarizo*, was used to call some one

fortunate or lucky, to congratulate him on his good luck. In the LXX the word is used to translate the Hebrew, *ashre* (for example, Ps. 1:1; 2:11; 32:1; 112:1). In all these passages the good fortune ascribed to man is associated not with material things, but with relation to God. In the New Testament the same thought prevails. Mary says that "all generations shall call me blessed, for He who is mighty has done great things for me" (Luke 1:48 f.). This blessedness is not a matter of physical kinship, but of hearing and keeping the Word of God (cf. Luke 11:27-28). The justified (Rom. 4:6 f.) and those who die "in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13) are called blessed. In all other places where Matthew uses the term (11:6; 13:16-17; 16:17; 24:46), he brings it into direct relationship with the Messiah.

In other words, the source and secret of true happiness lies in God's love and salvation and gift in Jesus Christ. Some of the versions try to reproduce this joyful state of affairs: *Good News for Modern Man*, "Happy are those who . . . !" Phillips, "How happy . . . !" NEB, "How blest . . ."

The Beatitudes are a series of paradoxes, saying the very opposite of what the world by its standards would expect. The world's standards are self-seeking, hedonistic, materialistic. The rich, the powerful, the popular, the comfortable are the fortunate ones. But the disciples of Christ, the children of God (5:16), have a different perspective. It is spiritual and eternal.

"The poor in spirit." Cf. Is. 57:15; Matt. 11:5. They are beggars before God, having nothing but their own need. "The kingdom of heaven" is where Christ is (4:17); it is God's loving and gracious control of their lives, the answer to all their needs.

And that is enough, that is everything. (Cf. John 14:8; Ps. 73:25-26.)

V. 4: The "mourners." Cf. Ps. 126:5-6; John 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom. 5:3; 8:35; 12:12; Is. 61:2; Rev. 7:17.

V. 5: The "meek." Meekness is anything but weakness. It characterizes a nobility and refinement of spirit, a tactfulness and considerateness and gentleness that are the very opposite of rude and hot-tempered behavior. It is modeled after the meekness of our Lord Himself (Matt. 11:29; 21:5) and is an expression of a serenity that rests in God. It is not a natural talent but a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23) and characterizes Christians in their interpersonal relations (Gal. 6:1; Eph. 4:2). This Beatitude is a commentary on Ps. 37:1-11.

V. 6. "Righteousness" here is not the righteousness of faith but of life. Cf. *Good News for Modern Man*. "Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires." The disciples are such as "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (6:33). We may distinguish but we cannot separate the two kinds of righteousness. Disciples want to do what is right because they have been made right with God through faith. Such hungering and thirsting will be satisfied.

V. 7. "The merciful." Another reflection of God's attitude (cf. 18:21-35).

V. 8: "The pure in heart." This has to do with sincerity, a clear conscience, in opposition to hypocrisy and evil lusts (cf. Matt. 15:19; Ps. 24:4; Ps. 51:17; 1 Tim. 1:5). They shall have the full and unclouded vision of God in eternal life. (Rev. 22:4)

V. 9: "The peacemakers." As their Lord is the Prince of peace (Is. 9:6) who by His birth has brought God's peace to earth (Luke 2:14) and has given it to His own (John 14:27; John 20:19) through His reconciling work (Eph. 2:14; Col. 1:20; Rom. 5:1), so the disciples are characterized by an attitude and activity bent on peace (Rom. 15:33). This, too, is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). "Sons of God." Like Father, like son.

Vv. 10-11. "Persecuted for righteousness' sake" is the same as "on My account." Far from being depressed by being made to suffer because of their relationship to Christ, the disciples rejoice in this fact. (Cf. Rom. 8:18; John 16:33; Rom. 5:3; 2 Cor. 7:4.)

"Theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

We have come full circle, back to the first Beatitude. The kingdom has present and future dimensions. The first and last Beatitude, and all others in between, are summed up in the ultimate, all-encompassing Beatitude, Matt. 25:34: "Come, O blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

(Note: Martin Franzmann, *Follow Me*, pp. 36-40, presents an insightful interpretation of the Beatitudes. I acknowledge my indebtedness to him.)

Preaching Suggestions

The traditional Laetare Propers stand under the Introit theme of "Rejoice and be glad." The Collect speaks of comfort, grace, and relief. The Epistle stresses our freedom as children of the promise and closes with a call to rejoice. The Gospel presents Jesus in all His compassion for the physical and spiritual needs of people. Our text closes on the same note, v. 12. This theme should pervade our preaching.

This text lends itself to a homily treatment, taking the beatitudes one by one, expounding them and applying them. Or

The Radiant Christian Life

- I. Its sources
- II. Its manifestation
- III. Its goal

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT: JUDICA

Genesis 18:20-21, 22b-33

Hebrews 9:15-22 or Rom. 5:1-5

Mark 10:32-45

The great theme of Romans is the Gospel, the power of God for salvation (1:16). It has to do with God's righteousness and man's faith (1:17). But before Paul explains what this means, he launches into a detailed discussion of the human situation to which God's saving Gospel addresses itself. Both the Gentile world and the Jewish world, God's own people, are utterly lost in sin and transgression (1:18-3:18). Both Gentile and Jew are without excuse (1:20; 2:1; 3:9). The devastating verdict is that the whole world is under God's judgment (3:19) and has no resources whatever to set things right with God. (3:20)

This section of the letter is one of the most depressing and terrifying descriptions

of the human condition in the whole Bible. Over the utter spiritual and moral bankruptcy of the creature hangs the inescapable wrath, judgment, and condemnation of the Creator. But this is the foil for what follows. This is not God's last word. There is an escape, and that is the theme of the next section (3:21—4:25).

"But now" (3:21), from the same God comes another revelation, designed to absorb and overcome the revelation of His wrath and judgment. This is God's incredible "Nevertheless" to His sinful creature. Now the language teems with words like Jesus Christ, redemption, expiation, forbearance, justification, forgiveness, righteousness, grace, promise, and faith. God's answer to man's need revolves around these summaries: We are "justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (3:24), "for we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law" (3:28), "to one who does not work but trusts Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness" (4:5); and finally, it is all wrapped up in "Jesus our Lord who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:24-25).

Romans 5:1-5

"Therefore," as a direct consequence of what has gone before, the apostle rounds out his discussion of the blessed deed of God in Christ by pointing to the blessed results. "Since we are justified." This aorist participle points to an accomplished fact of the past that is now the basis of a present situation. "By faith" emphasizes the gift character of justification, as opposed to its being achieved by our deeds.

V. 1. "We have peace with God." Paul is still in the area of justification, not sanctification. Hence the variant reading in some manuscripts, "let us have peace" (in the sense of, "let us stop fighting God; let us now behave peaceably toward God"), is inappropriate here. "We have" is the great indicative of the Gospel. We have it "through our Lord Jesus Christ," the Prince of peace, whose coming in the flesh brought peace on earth, who told His disciples (John 14:27) that His gift to them through His death is His peace, and who, in His first appearance to them after His resurrection, said, "Peace be unto you" (John 20:19). This peace is dynamic; it is God in

healing and restoring action toward His people as the outgrowth of His mercy. Hence the repeated apostolic greeting, as also in this letter (1:7), "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

V. 2. This peace is concrete. There is open access into God's saving grace. All barriers have been removed. At the death of Christ the temple veil that separated the people from the Holy of Holies and the mercy seat was torn in two. Through Christ and in Christ the way to the Father is unobstructed (John 14:6). (Cf. Eph. 3:12; 1 John 3:21.) Christ Himself is the "door." No intermediary except Jesus Christ is required.

With what we have through justification Paul links another verb, "and we rejoice" (rather, "we boast," repeated in the next verse). A blessed result of our new status with God is that we now have something to boast about. Paul, the former Pharisee, used to boast about his keeping of the Law and his superior righteousness. But all that is forgotten now. His only boasting is in the Lord, in Christ. He even prizes his own weakness in order to magnify the power of Christ. (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 11:30—12:10; Phil. 3:3-11.)

This boasting, this rejoicing has to do with "our hope of sharing the glory of God." Hope looks to the future, because of God's past performance in Christ. The prospect of that future glory staggers the imagination and beggars description. (Cf. Tit. 2:13; Rom. 8:14-18; Rev. 3:21.)

V. 3. "More than that." So great is the prospect of the future glory that it becomes retroactive for the present, no matter how difficult and painful. A Christian can cheerfully put up with any trouble because he knows and trusts Him who has overcome. (Cf. John 14-16, especially 14:1, 18, 27; 16:20-24, 33; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3-9.)

"Endurance"—"that resilient and athletic temper which is so sure of the future that it can live of the future and bear manfully the pressure of the present." (Franzmann, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 89)

V. 4. "Character." Phillips, "a mature character"; NEB, "proof that we have stood the test"; *Good News*, "God's approval." The picture is that of a battle-tested veteran or of a precious metal that has proved itself genuine under the most

exacting tests.

V. 5. We're back again with hope, a hope that does not disappoint us. The "love of God" is God's love for us (cf. v. 8), which fills our life through the activity of the Holy Spirit, God's gift to us. (Cf. Titus 3:3 ff. "loving kindness; mercy of God our Savior; baptism, regeneration, renewal, Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ our Savior; justified, grace, heirs, hope, eternal life.")

Preaching Suggestions

The Propers for Judica (Passion Sunday) strike the somber notes of enemies, tribulation, hatred, sin, lack of peace, separation from God; but, on the other hand, they point to God's defense, deliverance, guidance, mercy, the high-priestly functions of Christ. The text emphasizes the positive and wonderful blessings of God in Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is simply inexhaustible.

How Blessed It Is to Be a Christian!

- I. He has everything now.
 - II. He can put up with anything.
 - III. He has a great future.
- or

How Wonderful Is Our Lord Jesus Christ!

- I. Through Him we have wonderful gifts from God.
 - II. Through Him we look forward to a wonderful goal.
- or

Through our Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we share in all His gifts. Therefore

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

- I. Praise Him for all the blessings that flow from Him (note all the great words in the text: justified, peace, grace, love, access, hope, endurance, character, glory).
- II. Praise Him for all these blessings by trusting Him, glorifying Him, serving Him, sharing Him with others.

Herbert J. A. Bouman

SIXTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Introit and Gradual	Psalm 22
Old Testament Lesson	Is. 52:13-53:4
Epistle	Phil. 2:5-11
Gospel	Matt. 21:1-9

Psalm 22. This is a psalm of lament. In it the sufferer, who feels himself forsaken by God, prays for help (1-21). After he is assured of God's help, his response is that he will worship God in the congregation and recount His deed to the end of space (27) and time (30-31).

Phil. 2:5-11. An exhortation to let one's life be controlled by the attitude Jesus Christ displayed. He gave Himself for man in humble service and in so doing achieved a position of exaltation, in which He deserves to receive the worship of all men.

Matt. 21:1-9. The account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem at which time His disciples proclaimed Him to be the Messiah to people of Jerusalem.

Is. 52:13-53:4. The choice of the precise verses as a pericope is not only (like the woman who takes Geritol) incredible, it is also incomprehensible. There is some precedent for considering Is. 52:13-53:12 a unit of thought. But I don't know why anyone would deliberately cut it in two. If one did, verse 4 seems a strange place to stop. Like the boy who can't eat just one potato chip, surely no one could read 53:4 and not continue to read vv. 5-6.

But the choice is informed by unnecessary ignorance. Recent scholarship has demonstrated, at least to my satisfaction, that 52:13-15 is connected with and conceptually related to what precedes it (that is, 52:10-11; 51:9-52:15; 40-52), not what follows it (that is, 53:1-12). It is part of a thought unit (52:10-15) in which the prophet commands the exiles to depart from Babylon (10-11), after Cyrus had conquered Babylon and issued the decree permitting their return. This command is confirmed by a divine saying promising the success and exaltation of Israel in its task of being Yahweh's agent to the nations (13-15). Israel, who has been freed by Yahweh and Cyrus His agent, is ordered to act free—that is depart from Babylon—and is promised that this one small step for Israel will be a giant leap for mankind.

Isaiah 53:1-12 is a thought unit about a righteous sufferer. It is composed of two parts: (1) a corporate confession of some who have experienced the benefits of his suffering (1-10); (2) a divine word affirming that faith in this righteous sufferer is Yahweh's purpose. The point of vv. 2-3 is that he grew up and he suffered. The point of

v. 4 is that in his suffering he bore and carried away the sickness and the pains of those who are making the corporate confession. The point of v. 1 is that this good news is incredible—but true!

If our reader intends to employ this pericope for homiletical purposes, the best advice I can give is “don’t.” If, however, he is unmoved by such good advice, I would suggest that he choose either 52:13-15, and connect it with 10-11, or 53:1-4. Its theme is the success of Yahweh’s servant-Israel as it returns. In this form, in its literary context, the pericope has some conceptual relation to the Epistle.

Isaiah 52:10-15 is the conclusion of Is. 40–52, which is comprised of:

40:1-11. The experience of the prophet as he becomes privy to the divine council (call).

40:12–41:19. A description of Yahweh—God of Israel.

42:1–44:22. A description of Israel—the servant of Yahweh.

44:23–48:16. A description of Cyrus—the Messiah—who will achieve Israel’s liberation and security.

48:17–52:15. The command to return and the reasons for doing so. This section begins and ends with pericopes that command Israelites to return and that promise success as they do (48:17–49:12 and 52:10-15). In both, the return of Israel is viewed as the way Israel will be used for the conversion of the nations. The nations will watch as Yahweh delivers His people and in doing so will discern that Yahweh is a God who saves people. This plan is most clearly presented in 45:20-25 in which the prophet asserts that he has heard Yahweh swear (as he heard Him in the divine council, 40:1-11), “Every knee may/will bow to Me. Every tongue may/will swear allegiance to Me,” and therefore invites all people to turn to Yahweh and be saved. The oath of Yahweh in Is. 45:23 is the pericope that is quoted in Phil. 2:10-11.

Thus it becomes apparent that Is. 40–52 like Phil. 2:4-11 is God’s plan for achieving, through the agency of His people, the allegiance and worship of all people. In Isaiah the act required of God’s people was that they return. In Philippians the act required of God’s people is that they exhibit the same willingness for humble service that Jesus did. This theme fits well

with the outreach theme of the Introit (Ps. 22:22-31) and the petition of the Collect, “grant that we may follow the example of His patience.”

If our reader decides to choose Is. 53:1-4, he can relate it to the Gospel lesson (Matt. 21:1-9). Here believers in Jesus (that is, people who have experienced the benefits He bestows on His disciples) proclaim to the people of Jerusalem that Jesus is the Messiah. In spelling out the benefits people have previously received from this Messiah, Matthew in 8:14-17 has used Is. 53:4. Here he asserts that Jesus, by healing all who were sick, fulfilled the word “He took away our sicknesses and carried off our pains.” Matthew does not use Is. 53 in connection with Jesus’ suffering and death. For him Is. 53 was fulfilled when Jesus healed sickness. And it is those who had experienced the benefits of Jesus the Healer who proclaimed him as Messiah to the people of Jerusalem.

If our reader chooses Is. 53:1-4 as his text and relates it to the Gospel lesson, he, if he wishes to be Biblical, commits himself to preach a faith-healing sermon. The theme would be “Worship Your Benefactor,” and the message would be to believe in Jesus who can heal; because He is the agent appointed by God “to bear away our sickness and carry off our pain.”

This theme could be related to the Introit (Ps. 22:1-21).

THURSDAY IN HOLY WEEK

Introit Gal. 6:14 and Ps. 67

The psalm recounts the saving, delivering, liberating power of God. Gal. 6:14 suggests that that power was concentrated in the cross of our Lord Jesus.

Epistle 1 Cor. 11:23-26 or 17-32

Paul’s account of the institution of the Eucharist and his interpretation of its function.

Gospel John 13:1-15

The account of the foot washing. A traditional name for this day, “the day of the commandment” suggests 1-15 should be seen in light of 13:34.

Old Testament Lesson Ex. 12:1-12

The beginning of one account of the events of Passover night, the time when Israel most clearly experienced the liberating power of Yahweh.

I don't know why anyone would choose to read these precise verses. Verse 7 describes the use that is to be made of the blood. Verse 13 (not included in the pericope) explains the benefits of using the blood this way. Surely both ought to be included in the lesson. Verse 2 is hardly comprehensible without v. 14. For those for whom this pericope was written, this month was to be the first month of the year because it was the month they were freed from captivity. The punch line of the entire account comes in vv. 29-32 where we read that Yahweh's plan really worked, Israel was freed. If one is acquainted with the story of the nine preceding plagues that didn't work (chs. 7-11), he might be interested in the information that this one finally did. So it would seem one would want to read the entire chapter or, at least, the significant verses of the chapter, not just vv. 1-12.

However, I can see why those who pick pericopes (may their tribe decrease) didn't want the whole chapter read. An alert listener (if indeed such a possibility can be assumed) would be forced to conclude that Moses (if he is viewed as author of the chapter) must be a plural. The singular is Mose, and a first Mose and a second Mose must have contributed to the chapter. The material in 1-20 is repeated in 21-27. Therefore, if one wants to understand the account as presented by Mose¹ he must in 28-51 separate it from the account as presented by Mose². Though adequate help in separating the account of Mose¹ and Mose² is available in commentaries, it cannot be assumed that everyone who will be reading this sermon study will have such a commentary available. But if he does not separate one account from the other, he will force his listener to theorize about the two Moses. If our reader does not want to do that, the best Marcionist's advice we can give is to forget the Old Testament lesson in this service.

If one is undaunted by such good advice because he declared in Advent, "I'm going to preach on the Old Testament lessons this year," he should realize that the two accounts interwoven in Exodus 12 both have as their theme, "Yahweh's liberation of His people." Whatever he may choose to read as the Old Testament lesson or as his text, he ought to assert the good news is the fact that in this event God demon-

strated that He wants His people to be free. He might describe the protecting function of the blood. God doesn't clobber—in His action to free His people—those who live under the sign of the blood. The preacher might talk about how the event of liberation ought to be memorialized in the lives of those who benefited from it. He might even suggest that Christians would do well to concentrate on the event that freed them.

If the preacher chooses to relate this to the New Testament lesson, he should apply vv. 27-32 of that lesson by bluntly confronting any person in his audience who thinks he can enjoy God's liberation and at the same time treat another person in the body of Christ as a slave.

If he chooses to relate this to the Gospel lesson, he should make the point I think I've heard expressed somewhere—we who have been freed by Christ and enjoy that freedom ought like him to willingly become the servants of all men. That's what "Love one another as I have loved you" seems to mean, especially in the context of John 13:1-15.

Holland H. Jones

GOOD FRIDAY

The Day: Good Friday is the church's great day of mourning; at the same time it is the church's great day of rejoicing. According to *The Church's Year of Grace*, the word "grief-stricken" might best describe the spirit of this hour. In ancient times this day was aliturgical, that is, there was no prescribed liturgy. In many places, as a sign of mourning, no services were held at all; where services were held, they were solemn and simple, void of any festal element. Traditionally there was, and in many parishes there is even to this day, no celebration of the Eucharist. There were no assigned propers: no Introit, Collect, or Gradual. The Lessons were longer readings of the Passion Narratives and related pericopes. But all was not gloom. The day is called *Good* Friday, and the goodness of this day lies in the anticipation of the completed act of redemption. Even in the most ancient of Good Friday liturgies that note of joyful anticipation is seen, for example, in the final petition of thanksgiving:

Remember Thy mercies, O Lord, and with never-failing protection, sanctify Thy ser-

vants for whom Christ, Thy Son inaugurated the Easter mystery in His own blood.

Old Standard

Old Testament: Isaiah 50:6-9 or Isaiah 53:4-12 or Hosea 6:1-6

Epistle: Isaiah 52:13–53:12 or Revelation 5:1-4

Gospel: St. John 18:1–19:42

ILCW Lectionary

Old Testament: Isaiah 53:4-12 or Hosea 6:1-6

Epistle: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 or Hebrews 5:(1-6)7-9

Gospel: St. John 19:16-30 (31-42)

The ILCW Old Testament Lesson, Isaiah 53, picks up the concluding portion of the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah. To get the full flavor of this pericope, one should begin his study with Isaiah 52:7 ff. Note that this song is set in dialog form between God and the pagan nations. The form must be kept in mind in preparing the pericope for reading; perhaps several experienced readers, in dialog, might be employed. In the opening dialog God declares His Servant victorious and triumphant. The nations, and specifically their kings, respond in astonishment: They are horrified as they see this Servant marred beyond human semblance; He grew up among God's own people, taking upon Himself their sins, but he was rejected by them; He is the silent, innocent, suffering Lamb, committed to the task that God has laid upon Him, condemned and killed. God's response: this was His plan. In the death of His Servant God makes known His salvation.

The Epistle, 2 Corinthians 5, further points up God's plan. The purpose of Christ's dying for all was not just to save people from their sin and from God's judgment. It is also for the purpose of establishing a new relationship between God and His people. God's people are to be God's representatives, involved in the urgent ministry of reconciliation, useful and capable, equipped by the One who knew no sin, but was made sin for us, that we, and all people, might receive God's gracious gift of life, that we might become the righteousness of God.

The Gospel from St. John suggests that there is more to this day than a mournful remembrance. The Gospel does not dwell

on the minute details of the crucifixion, but instead uses that detail to direct our attention to the seventh and greatest "semeïon," the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The entire purpose of Saint John's Gospel is "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." That purpose must always be clearly in mind when approaching any pericope from this Gospel. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is a humiliation, to be sure, but a humiliation that leads to exaltation and the reversal of all that such a death should mean. Our Lord's death is not the end of God's plan; it is the beginning of the culmination of that plan. The cross is the way which leads to victory. This is the Father's way. The hour of His triumph is near. The last great "semeïon" is at hand: Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, who truly died, now lives! The work of redemption: "It is finished!" It is complete. This and all the other signs are written that you may believe and live! This begins to suggest a sermon theme based on the Holy Gospel:

Behold the Cross: Believe! Live!

Through the cross of Jesus Christ, God reveals and completes His plan for our eternal salvation. Believe! Live!

- I. Believe God's Salvation revealed through the cross.
 - A. What God reveals is so unbelievable. How difficult it is to accept God's good news that through the death of Jesus Christ, His Son, we have eternal life.
 - B. God makes the unbelievable believable. He equips us by the witness of His Word, which He caused to be written so that we might believe.
- II. Live God's Salvation revealed through the cross.
 - A. That is not always easy. If to believe God's salvation is difficult, to live God's salvation is another matter: that demands our all, something we may not be willing to give.
 - B. God equips us no longer to live to ourselves, but fully to live in His salvation in love and service to Him and to one another.

EASTER DAY A

The Season: "This is the day which the

Lord hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it." These words of the Easter Gradual set the mood for this Feast of feasts. From its earliest observance, Easter is the day—the season—of joy and gladness, of feasting and celebration. In the middle ages, however, much of this joy was lost due to the greater emphasis upon Passiontide and its more solemn observances. But in recent times the Easter celebration has been restored to its rightful place of honor as the Queen of Feasts, the climax to the church's Year of Grace. Joy and gladness dominate this day—this season—especially as the Easter observance reaches its climax in the celebration and reception of the Holy Eucharist.

The Day: The suggested reading for the Holy Gospel, which always sets the theme for the day, is the church's historic reading for this festival, St. Mark 16:1-8. Perhaps that is good, for St. Mark zeroes in on an emphasis of our Lord's resurrection that is badly needed in our day of fear, suspicion, and doubt.

Old Standard	ILCW Lectionary
Is. 25:1-8	Job 19:25-27
1 Cor. 5:6-8	Col. 3:1-4
Mark 16:1-8	Mark 16:1-8

"When I awake, I am still with Thee, Alleluia!" Words of joy and gladness. In the face of death itself, God does not forsake His own. In that confidence the church uses these words from Psalm 139 for its entrance hymn for the first celebration of the Easter Feast. In these words the church catches a glimpse of what might have been the very first thought of the rising Lord; His morning prayer, so to speak, as He rises up from the sleep of death.

That same joy and confidence is expressed in the Old Testament Lesson from the ILCW Lectionary, Job 19. Here is the bold statement of a man who completely puts his trust and confidence in God as his redeemer or vindicator.

The Epistle from Colossians picks up that same theme. Without reservation the apostle declares his trust in the risen Christ, who, when He comes again, will glorify those who are safely hidden in Him, through Holy Baptism.

The Collect puts it all together in one terse petition, asking God to put into our hearts and minds the same confidence and trust, so that by God's continual help we

may live lives that please Him.

The Holy Gospel is God's answer to our petition. "Do not be astonished! The Lord is risen! He is not here!" What are we to do with such words that are totally unbelievable to a 20th-century thinking person? Today one demands proof. People just don't rise from the dead. Death is final. Unfortunately the church often gets caught up in this trap of looking for historic and scientific evidence to prove God's great event in history, the resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. To do so is utter foolishness and only demonstrates that what we call faith may not be faith at all. Our insistence upon proof only points out our unfaith. For even when there is proof—"See for yourselves the place where they put Him"—such proof does not give rise to trust and confidence in the fulfillment of God's promises. The Gospel tells us: the women fled, trembling and bewildered. They did not do the one thing they were commissioned to do: go and tell. They told no one anything; for they were afraid. Only as God our Father, for Jesus' sake, equips us with eyes of faith, can we be filled with confidence and trust, rejoice in God's resurrection of Jesus Christ, and speak God's Good News of salvation to others.

The Sermon (based on the Holy Gospel): Be not astonished! Jesus lives! Rejoice! The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead demands our faith, faith which God Himself has given to us; it does not demand our proving it.

Believe! Rejoice! Tell!

I. Believe! Jesus Lives!

A. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is too much to believe. Like the women in the Gospel, man's first reaction to God's proclamation—He is risen! He is not here!—is astonishment. That can become a problem even for God's own people. We too can become so astonished and alarmed that we look for proof of the resurrection and put our trust and confidence in that proof.

B. Only as God equips us with faith can we be filled with the kind of trust and confidence that demands no proof. Even when we have our proof—case in point:

the women—such proof does not give rise to faith. Faith is God's gift, His gift through Holy Baptism, His Word, Holy Absolution, and Holy Communion.

II. Rejoice! Jesus Lives!

A. In faith, we rejoice on this happy day, not with the joy in which the world rejoices with its parades and feasts and colored eggs; but we rejoice that in our Lord's resurrection we are God's own.

B. Only God can give us the right perspective on the joy of this day; only He can give us the joy that looks forward to that day of our Lord's coming when we shall appear with Him in glory.

III. Go! Tell! Jesus Lives!

A. Meanwhile, we are His messengers of Good News! The angel was God's first messenger of Good News. He now entrusts His Good News to us. Fear, astonishment, alarm, unfaith can and often do immobilize us no less than the women that first Easter day, and we end up telling no one anything.

B. God overcomes our immobilization. He puts to rest our fears, whatever they may be. He empowers us for action. Through His Word for us and the Blessed Sacraments, he enables us to be His messengers of Good News to those who seek Jesus. He is risen! He is risen indeed!

David E. Deppe

EASTER DAY B

Old Testament: Jonah 2:2-9

Epistle: 1 Cor. 15:12-20 or Acts 10:34-43

Gospel: John 20:1-9(10-18) or Luke 24:33-49

Jonah's psalm describes death or Sheol as a "land whose bars have eternal bolts." It is a unique and appropriate way to describe the terminal phenomenon to which all humanity is subject. It is also applicable in a special way to the "realm of the dead" to which our Lord went down. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," Matt. 12:40. The psalm uses an abundance of other pictures

to describe the pains of death that the prophet endured. These are found in verses 3-6a and 7a.

But Yahweh gave neither his prophet nor his Son up to the power of death (Ps. 16:10); rather He restored them to life, He delivered them from the land of the bars with eternal bolts. Such deliverance is also referred to in the Jonah psalm; it is closely associated with the cries and pleas of the prophet in verses 2, 6b, 7b-9. Deliverance from the "bolts of eternity" is also promised to us in the Easter message: The Lord will bring us up alive from the pit, as He brought up Christ. Do we plead for life, as the prophet did?

In Melville's *Moby Dick*, Father Mapple introduces his sermon with the following paraphrase of Jonah's psalm:

The ribs and terrors in the whale,
Arched over me a dismal gloom,
While all God's sun-lit waves rolled by,
And lift me deepening down to doom.

I saw the opening maw of hell,
With endless pains and sorrows there;
Which none but they that feel can tell—
Oh, I was plunging to despair.

In black distress, I called my God,
When I could scarce believe him mine,
He bowed his ear to my complaints—
No more the whale did me confine.

With speed he flew to my relief,
As on a radiant dolphon borne;
Awful, yet bright, as lightning shone
The face of my Deliverer God.

My song for ever shall record
That terrible, that joyful hour;
I give the glory to my God,
His all the mercy and the power.

Jonah 2:1. Commenting on Jonah 1:17 and 2:1, Luther observed that those were certainly the longest three days and nights that ever occurred under the sun:

I hold that he lay down some of the time and stood up part of the time. He saw neither sun nor moon nor was able to count an hour. He did not know where in the sea he was riding around with the fish. How often the lungs and the liver may have smitten him! How wonderful was his residence there amidst the intestines and great ribs.

For Luther the voyage was so unusual, that any one would say it was unbelievable, it was a lie and fairy tale, were it not in the Scripture.

V. 2. "Being inside Sheol" is a phrase that

is used to designate grave illness in Psalm 6:5; 18:5; 30:3. Sheol is described as a monster with a huge maw in Isaiah 5:14. There is a striking parallel to Jonah's experience in the book of Jeremiah: The prophet regarded Babylon as a great sea monster that God raised up to swallow His people. But even in the Sheol of the Captivity, Israel found that her God was graciously with her and would deliver her (Jer. 51:34, 44). According to Luther the fish's belly was not hell. Rather the belly of the fish was as hell to him; Jonah had his hell inside the fish.

Moreover this opening verse of the psalm teaches us the importance of calling on God when we are in trouble. It is easier to run away from an angry God, harder to turn to Him in prayer. The fact that the prophet in this verse speaks *about* Yahweh rather than *to* Him may suggest that the author originally made this statement before the assembled congregation in the temple. To his friends and relatives he would thereby say that all distress should be viewed in the light of God's help.

V. 3. The danger of drowning is described in this verse. Here the waves and the billows are really engulfing the author, whereas in Psalm 42:7 they are referred to in a figurative sense. The prophet speaks as though it had been God who threw him into the sea. That, says Luther, is what conscience does. Conscience can make man cringe before a mere leaf, even though the same man remained unaffected by the wrath of God before. The waves and billows belong to God, as though they are all in God's service, all against the prophet.

V. 4. At first Jonah fled from Yahweh's presence, but now he says that in his distress he is cast out from the divine presence (like the author of Psalm 31:22a). Being in Yahweh's gracious presence means enjoying His fellowship and communion. In vv. 3b and 4a God is the opponent of the author, who not only forsook him but also drove him away. That makes him recall with nostalgia the joy of past fellowship with God in the temple, from which he is now excluded. "How shall I" is a better reading than "Surely I shall" (4b), because the utter confidence of the latter phrase is out of context here. In similar distress we Christians would no doubt think of heaven, but Jonah thought of the Jerusalem temple, because to him that was the dwelling place of Yahweh.

Jonah is presented as a model of repentance in the following excerpt from Father Mapple's sermon:

Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord out of the fish's belly. But observe his prayer and learn a weighty lesson. For sinful as he is, Jonah does not weep and wait for direct deliverance. He feels that his dreadful punishment is just. He leaves all his deliverance to God, contenting himself with this, that spite of all his pains and pangs, he will still look towards His holy temple. And here, shipmates, is true and faithful repentance; not clamorous for pardon, but grateful for punishment. And how pleasing to God was this conduct in Jonah is shown in the eventual deliverance of him from the sea and the whale. Shipmates, I do not place Jonah before you to be copied for his sin, but I do place him before you as a model for repentance. Sin not; but if you do, take heed to repent of it like Jonah.

V. 5. The waters were either choking the prophet or threatening his life in some other way. The seaweed around his head suggests that his submerged body is close to the sea bottom. According to Hebrew thinking the earth rested on the subterranean ocean. The mountains, being the earth's pillars, were anchored on the foundation of the ocean.

V. 6. The first part of this verse is unique in the Old Testament: there is no parallel for the idea that the gates of Sheol are fixed by bolts that can never be loosed. Milton might have used such imagery. In the boundless deep the drowning prophet sinks to the mountain bases, where he is confined beneath an iron grill like a prisoner in the depths of a dungeon. Being brought up alive from the pit is a picture that is used of recovery from a serious illness. (Psalm 30:3)

V. 7. Being in Sheol may well have been one of the ways in which the ancient Hebrew described the loss of consciousness. Regaining consciousness would then be interpreted by him as being brought back to life. In the prophet's last moment of consciousness his prayer was directed to God's temple, and God heard him. This verse demonstrates the need and power of prayer (cf. v. 2). Jonah is convinced that God delivered him because the prophet asked Him to. Had he acted like the heathen in the next verse (8), deliverance would not have been forthcoming.

V. 8. While the idols forsake their followers in time of distress, Yahweh proved Himself faithful and a present help in

trouble. They who worship such idols give up "their true loyalty," that is, their gracious God. In this verse Luther demonstrates his freedom as an interpreter. He deliberately omits the pronoun "their" (in front of "true loyalty"), to make sure that the reader will know that it is God's mercy and not man's which is meant.

V. 9. The prophet promises to bring Yahweh some material gift, perhaps an animal. Did the vow here mean Jonah's resolve to obey God in the future? That is possible but not specified in the text. The concluding comment, "Salvation is of Yahweh" (9b, cf. Psalm 3:8), provides the connecting link between the psalm and the last two chapters of the book. In summary, the entire psalm, by stressing the seriousness of God's judgment and the greatness of His grace, sets the stage very effectively for the events described in chapters 3-4. It also provides an excellent supplementary tool for the pastor to use in his proclamation of the Easter message.

Eternal delight is the theme of the dramatic conclusion of the Reverend Mapple's sermon:

Delight is to him, whom all the waves of the billows of the seas of the boisterous mob can never shake from this sure Keel of the Ages. And eternal delight and deliciousness will be his, who coming to lay him down can say with his final breath—O Father!—chiefly known to me by Thy rod—mortal or immortal, here I die. I have striven to be Thine, more than to be this world's, or mine own. Yet this is nothing: I leave eternity to Thee; for what is man that he should live out the lifetime of his God?

From Eternal Bolts to Eternal Life

- I. The Bars with Eternal Bolts, Jonah 2:3-6a, 7a
 1. Yahweh threw him into the deep.
 2. He went down into the heart of the seas.
 3. The flood surrounded him.
 4. Yahweh's waves and billows passed over him.
 5. He felt cast out of Yahweh's sight.
 6. He was unable to look at Yahweh's temple.
 7. The waters took his breath.
 8. The deep surrounded him.
 9. Weeds encircled his head.
 10. He reached the bottom of the mountains.

11. He was on his way to the land whose bars have eternal bolts.
12. He was on the verge of losing consciousness.
- II. The Plea for Life with Yahweh, Jonah 2:2, 6b, 7b-9
 1. He cried to Yahweh, and Yahweh answered him.
 2. He called, and Yahweh heard his voice.
 3. He remembered Yahweh.
 4. His prayer came to Yahweh in his holy temple.
 5. Yahweh brought him up alive from the pit.
 6. Yahweh showed that He was the prophet's God.
 7. The prophet recognized the folly of idolatry.
 8. He showed his gratitude by bringing a sacrifice.
 9. He was ready to fulfill his vows.
 10. He acknowledged that deliverance comes from Yahweh.

EASTER, SECOND OF (First Sunday After Easter)

Old Testament: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Epistle: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Gospel: John 20:19-31 or Luke 24:13-35

During the Middle Ages many representations of the resurrection of the dead were taken directly from the 37th chapter of Ezekiel. This dramatic and powerful vision, however, is difficult to date. The desperate plight of the exiles in 37:11b suggests that they are living not long after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B. C. The dry bones of this vision are primarily a figure for the people of God in captivity. After the deportation of 587 B. C. the exiled Hebrews were heard to say, "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off" (Ezek. 37:11b). In response to this community lament, the hand of Yahweh seized the prophet and brought him out by the Spirit to a place in which the people's lament took on physical reality: there was a field full of dry bones.

The vision that was attached to this field assured the people that as a nation they would be raised from the dead. What did that mean? Primarily the resurrection of the people meant that Yahweh would bring them back to the land of Palestine from which they had been exiled. Ulti-

mately the Dry Bones Vision pointed to that King of kings and Lord of lords who as Yahweh's mediator broke through the gates of death and freed not only Israel but all mankind from its power. A good example of the way in which Ezekiel 37 was later applied to the general resurrection of the dead may be noted in Revelation 11:7-12.

Ezek. 37:1. The "hand of Yahweh" marks a mystery that psychology cannot explain, a vision that the physical eye cannot discern. The same phrase is used in 1:3 and 8:1. It means that in a prophetic trance the power of Yahweh lays immediate hold on this man, and his mind is brought directly into Yahweh's service. In spirit the prophet is whisked away from the city of Tel Abib and is transported to the same field or plain as the one referred to in 3:22-24. But how the picture of the plain has changed since the prophet's call in 3:22! Then it unfolded the majestic glory of Yahweh; now it unfolds the grim triumph of death. But the mysterious vision does not end with death's victory. As the prophecy continues, it proclaims a wondrous promise of life, it announces God's once-and-for-all triumph over death.

V. 2. As the prophet is led through the field with very many, very dry bones, he feels the weird pallor of death everywhere. It becomes painfully obvious to Ezekiel that this is indeed "the valley of the shadow of death" (Psalm 23:4). The bone-littered field may be an abandoned battlefield that symbolizes the defeat Israel suffered at the hands of the Babylonians. Verse 9 suggests that the bones are all that remains of the people who have been killed there; the other remains of their bodies have disintegrated and decayed long ago. The ancient world attached greater importance to bones than we do today. Pedersen has pointed out that bones were closely associated with the soul by the Hebrews. As a good heart or a good kidney made for a good soul, so good bones contributed to such soul goodness.

V. 3. Yahweh confronts the prophet with an extraordinary question, "Can these bones live?" The question comes as a surprise to the prophet. Why should Yahweh ask such a question? How should Ezekiel know? Only God can know the answer! Traditionally the Hebrews were resigned to the finality of death. The prophet's

answer may therefore be doubly negative: "I don't need to tell you, Yahweh; we both know that to be dead means to be dead!" Had the prophet not consigned Tyre and Egypt to the permanent lot of Sheol in 28:18-19; 31:15-17; 32:18?

But Ezekiel's answer may be less evasive and more hopeful. From man's viewpoint there can be no hope that these bones will live again. But Yahweh's power to produce and maintain life is unlimited, as indicated in Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:6 (cf. also Deuteronomy 32:39, 2 Kings 5:7). Israel remembered a number of examples of Yahweh's bringing the dead back to life: the son of the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17:19-21; the son of the Shunamite, 2 Kings 4:18-37; the man revived by touching Elisha's bones, 2 Kings 13:20-21. Ezekiel too is about to see that God not only can miraculously break death's power, but he can even utilize the prophetic word to bring such a miracle to pass.

Vv. 4-6. Yahweh commissions the prophet to address a word of great potency to the fleshless and lifeless bones. He is to tell them to listen to Yahweh's word, so that these very dead bones may be converted into living people. Will he obey or will he cop out? Will he meet the divine challenge? Will he experience the miraculous fulfillment?

"Dry bones, listen!" The prophet is bidden to speak that reviving word when there is no one to listen to it. God himself provides the listeners. So we are not to give up our programs when there appear to be no takers. God raises up his own takers. Thus this paradoxical directive charts the course for all those who work with the Word. Physical or spiritual revival is not a matter of human effort; it is the mighty act of a sovereign God. The vision of the dry bones reveals a God who makes possible what is impossible.

It is difficult to decide how to translate the word *ruach*, which occurs in verses 5, 6, and reappears in verses 8-10 and in 14. Does it mean wind, spirit, or breath? In verse 9 it means the breath that gives life to the dead bodies, but it is also used of the four winds from which the breath comes. In 14 it is clearly used of the spirit of Yahweh.

Vv. 7-8. As the prophet speaks, his words call forth an extraordinary event; he witnesses the complete rebuilding of the

bodies. There is a strange rattling sound, the bones come together, sinews are attached to them, flesh is put on, and the members are covered with skin. Thus the complete framework of the bodies is restored, but they are still lifeless forms like the first man molded of clay in Genesis 2.

Vv. 9-10. Only when God breathes the breath of life into these bodies, as He did in the beginning, can they be truly alive. Therefore a second command comes from Yahweh, "Prophesy to the wind!" The prophet summons the breath of life, he bids it come from the four winds, to descend on the bodies of the slain and thus to animate them. In response to the prophet's word there are blasts of wind from all directions. The spirit of life breathes on these reassembled bodies, and they come to life. What an unheard of phenomenon!

The spirit is a familiar concept in the Old Testament. It is associated with a mystery liquid that God pours out upon the world, infusing it with life. When God pours His life-spirit out, the whole world of creation is kept alive. But when God pulls His life-breath back, the whole creature world succumbs to death and corruption (Job 33:4, Psalm 104:29-30). So also here, when Ezekiel summons the spirit of life, breath comes into the bodies, many people come to life and stand up. Thanks to the concentrated inundation of the field of bones by God's vitalizing spirit, a major blow is struck at the power of death.

This vision has much to say about the doctrine of the spirit. The wind is the symbol of the spirit. It stirs all around us, but we cannot see it. That teaches us not to rely only on the observable. The realm of the spirit simply cannot be subjected to calculating and computerizing.

Vv. 11-13. The vision of the dry bones is finished. But what does it mean? Yahweh explains it to the prophet. The bones are Israel in exile, Israel in despair. There they see only what is visible, and that leads to the point of no return. But Yahweh reminds them that He is the God of the resurrection, even though He has given His people only vague hints of such a new life in their past history.

In the first ten verses of Ezekiel 37 it seems obvious that this chapter is an expression of faith in the resurrection of the dead. But what was it that originally prompted Yahweh to unfold this vision

to his prophet? It was Israel's hopeless lament in 11b, "Our bones are dried up and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off." In the Dry Bones Vision God reverses this lament and says Israel's bones are not dried up, they are going to be made fresh and alive and free. Jerusalem's fall gave Israel every reason to believe that as a nation her hope was lost, she was completely cut off. But now God promises to liberate His captive people and to return them to their homeland. That is what the revived bones say to the people.

It is significant that in verse 12 the original picture of a field of dry bones shifts to the picture of a cemetery. Babylon was known as the cemetery in which many nations of antiquity were given burial. The opening of the graves and the raising from the tombs is thus a picture of Yahweh's flinging the prison gates of Babylon wide open. Along with such new life and new freedom there will also be a new understanding of who Yahweh their God is (v. 13). When Jerusalem fell, Yahweh acted in the role of a punitive judge. But now His people will learn that as a grave opener He will also show His might and compassion in the restoration of His people's fortunes.

V. 14. The fact that the words "You shall know that I am Yahweh" are used in verses 6, 13, and 14 shows how certain and how permanent the fellowship with Yahweh will be. Thus God assures His people that knowledge of Him and communion with Him is their only basis for hope. "I will put My spirit within you, and you shall live!" God's spirit is the symbol of extraordinary power and vitality. By the spirit a man is carried beyond his usual capacity to perform a task that would normally be out of his reach. As the wind blows where it will, so the spirit comes upon men in the least expected circumstances and enables them to rise to new heights of kingdom service.

In 37:11 exiled Israel lamented that her hope was lost. Today there is a Zionist song whose title affirms, "We still have not lost our hope!" (Hebr. *Od Lo Avedah Tikwathenu*). The modern State of Israel may claim that it is the fulfillment of the promise of 37:12, "I will place you in your own land." But the secularization of the Israel of today makes it quite doubtful whether it still knows Yahweh as Lord, and that casts a shadow on any claim of fulfillment.

The true fulfillment of this promise can be realized only in the new covenant of Jeremiah 31. Its goal is the renewal of all humanity by the Spirit of Christ. The God who works spiritual renewal now will ultimately bring to pass the physical resurrection that is symbolized in Ezekiel 37. Then the one Shepherd will father His one flock with no traces of division, schism, or brokenness.

Supplement 1

The reader of Ezekiel 37 may be interested in a dramatized version (D. S. Russell and M. R. Bielby, *Two Refugees: Ezekiel and Second Isaiah*. London: SCM, 1962, pp. 83–87) of the dry bones vision that has recently been published. The drama opens with the thirsty prophet out in the desert among the bones. He has only a few drops of water left in his flask. He asks, "What can Yahweh require of me here, when there is no sign of life?" A vulture answers, "I am here, waiting!" Ezekiel mumbles the fourth verse of the Shepherd Psalm, "Even though I walk . . ." The vulture mocks him with laughter and glee. Suddenly God appears disguised as a man holding a shepherd's staff. He orders the prophet to prophesy first to the bones, then to the wind.

Presently a multitude of people, including women and men, are brought to life. They symbolize the entire house of Israel which Yahweh promises to release from its entombment in Babylon. As Ezekiel bows in submission, hardly noting that the vulture and the shepherd are gone, he hears a trickling sound and notes a few sprigs of green grass. Replenishing his flask, he returns to his people in the city, eager to report to them concerning the new life that Yahweh has promised.

Supplement 2

The paintings of the Dura-Europos Synagogue, discovered in Babylon in 1934, indicate that in the third century A. D. the Dry Bones Vision was interpreted as or applied to the resurrection of all Israel from the dead.

The left side of the synagog painting depicts four figures in Persian garments, each one gesturing with his arms in different positions. The hand of Yahweh reaches down from heaven towards each of the four figures, suggesting that they represent the prophet Ezekiel at various stages of

the Dry Bones Vision.

On the right side of the Dura painting there are two figures in Greek garments, only one of whom has the hand of Yahweh reaching down to him. This pair seems to represent the future David, the Messianic king, who in addition to his royal role will also engage in prophetic functions.

Between the two Messianic leaders are ten marchers in three files, all wearing Greek clothing. They appear to represent the great throng of revived Israelites who are being led to the future land of promise. The mountains on either side of the painting suggest that the valley of the dry bones lies between them.

In the center of the Ezekiel painting there are six male bodies, two rows with three in each. They represent the reassembled corpses. Three hovering spirits and one standing spirit are about to fulfill the four-wind prophecy by animating the six lifeless men.

All over the valley legs, arms, heads and ribs are scattered about to illustrate the abundance of dry bones. An earthquake is suggested by the falling building and the split mountain. The ribs below ground level convey the idea of graves. Notably absent in the entire scene are the bodies of any females.

Back to Life from the Valley of Death

I. The Prophesied Word, Ezek. 37:1-6

1. The hand of Yahweh.
2. Do dead bones arise? Yahweh knows.
3. The prophecy to the bones.
4. The meaning of wind, breath, and spirit.
5. The renewal of sinews, flesh, and skin.
6. Knowledge of Yahweh in prophecy (see III, 5).

II. The Fulfilled Word, Ezek. 37:7-10

1. The prophet's obedience to the divine command.
2. The rattling noise and reassembling of the bodies.
3. The breath from the four winds.
4. The host of the slain come to life.

III. The Interpreted Word, Ezek. 37:11-14

1. The bones symbolize the whole house of Israel.
2. Israel said, "Our bones are dried up."
3. The opening of graves and raising from tombs.
4. The homecoming to the land of

Israel.

5. Knowledge of Yahweh in fulfillment (see I, 6).
6. The input of the Spirit.

Alfred von Rohr Sauer

ASCENSION DAY

Once upon a time, back in the 16th and 17th centuries, Ascension Day was a major festival in the Church of the Augsburg Confession. In some areas, Saxony, for instance, it was the day on which the parish annually began to deck the church with greenery through Trinity Sunday.¹

But the feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ has been in some trouble for quite a few decades in the Lutheran churches of North America. The precise date when the crisis began is indeterminable; the onset probably varied from place to place. The culprit was urbanization, coupled with a declining interest in anything as irregular as a service on Thursday. The relegation of the Ascension Day service almost exclusively to the evening is now a phenomenon of such long standing among us that few Lutherans in North America can remember any other practice. Most pastors have long since resigned themselves to Ascension night congregations even smaller than those that are present at Advent weekday vespers. Some in desperation have transferred the observance of the feast to the following Sunday—unconsciously repeating a Prussian experiment initiated precisely two hundred years ago. From 1773 on, our Lord's ascension was celebrated in Prussia on Exaudi Sunday, until the people successfully demanded its return to its own day in 1789.²

What lethargy and indifference began, the new Lutheran Lectionary seems bent on completing by all but totally eliminating the Ascension from the Ascension pericopes that it proposes.

The Old Testament Lesson for the feast in *The Lutheran Liturgy* is Is. 57:15. It has no obvious reference to the Ascension

and hence no claim on retention. The situation is different in the case of the two lessons set forth in the *Service Book and Hymnal*, 2 Kings 2:9-15, the ascension of Elijah, and, as an alternate lesson, Gen. 5:21-24, God's "taking" of Enoch. These offer at least analogies to the New Testament event. The new Lutheran Lectionary prescribes instead Is. 45:18-25, with Dan. 7:13-14 as an alternate. Like the lesson of *The Lutheran Liturgy*, neither lesson has any obvious link with the Ascension.

The traditional Epistle, Acts 1:1-11, is the fullest Ascension account in the New Testament. The new Lutheran Lectionary retains it, but it blithely lops off the first three verses. Since these verses contain the only reference to the forty days between Easter and the Ascension, the rationale for observing the Ascension Day on the sixth Thursday after Easter has disappeared as far as the pericopes are concerned. The alternate Epistle, Eph. 4:7-13, refers an allusion to Yahweh's "ascension" in Ps. 68:18 to Christ. The accent of the pericope is not, however, on the "historical" ascension that put a period to Christ's postpaschal appearance to His disciples and that Ascension Day commemorates. It rather has in mind the "theological" ascension of Christ, under which St. Paul (like the Fourth Gospel; see John 20:17) comprehends the whole exaltation of our Lord from His victory over death to the session at the right hand of His Father that will continue until the "end." (1 Cor. 15:20-26)³

The traditional Ascension Day Gospel, Mark 16:14-20, was admittedly not a good choice. Taken as it was from the textually dubious "long ending" that the second-century church had tacked on to the Third Gospel, the fact that the Revised Standard Version printed it in a footnote in italics did not add to its authority as authentic Scripture. Beyond that, only one verse in the pericope refers to the Ascension. One might have hoped that the revisers of the lectionary would follow the example of the Book of Common Prayer and select Luke 24:44-53 (or at least 24:50-53). This would have been a good choice, even though the words "and was carried up into

¹ Christian Gerber, *Historie der Kirchen-Ceremonien in Sachsen* (Dresden: Raphael Christian Saueressig, 1732), p. 141, cited in Paul Graff, *Geschichte der Aufloesung der alten gottesdienstlichen Formen in der evangelischen Kirche Deutschlands*, 2nd edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1937-1939), 1, 105, note 11.

² Graff, 2, 79.

³ See the present writer's "Ascension Day—Acts 1:1-11" in *Sermonic Studies: The Standard Epistles*, 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), 349-60 (especially 350-53).

heaven" at the end of v. 51 are apparently only a scribal expansion of "while He blessed them, He parted from them." Instead the revisers chose Matt. 28:16-20, which has no reference to the Ascension.

Thus, unless he preaches from the curtailed Epistle, a pastor who wishes to preach on the Ascension on Ascension Day is thrown back on the propers. The antiphon of the Introit ("Men of Galilee") is from the Epistle (Acts 1:11). The Introit Psalm is Ps. 47[:1]. Both the traditional Collect ("Grant, we beseech Thee") and the Collect that the Book of Common Prayer adapted from the antiphon on Magnificat at the second vespers explicitly refer to the Ascension. The Alleluia Verses ("Gradual") utilize Ps. 47:5 and 68:18, both of which contain Ascension analogies. The traditional Preface not only refers to the Ascension but is also an admirable piece of liturgical theology.

The most explicit Ascension text in the lectionary remains the Epistle, Acts 1:4-11. Even though the Epistle as prescribed begins at v. 4, the preacher will be well advised to begin his text with v. 1, so as to bring in the Ascension accents in vv. 2 and 3. The text contains few pitfalls. The preacher will of course be careful not to give his hearers the impression that our Lord was returning to His place at the Father's right hand that He had forsaken 34 years before when He became a human being by the power of the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary. The preacher may even want to warn his hearers not to take too literally the highly metaphorical hymns that suggest something like this (Nos. 213, 214, and 221, for example). He may find it useful in an era of Neopentecostalism to stress that the baptism with the Holy Spirit (v. 5) is not to be thought of as something apart from the sacramental washing with water in which God imparts his Holy Spirit to us. He will stress the forward thrust of the pericope toward the parousia, the date of which is part of the times and seasons that God has reserved to His own counsel and authority (v. 7). In the year of Key 73 the preacher will also emphasize the obligation of Christians to be Christ's witnesses everywhere in the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 8). He will refrain from suggesting even by implication that the ascension of our Lord carried Him past the point where the cloud took Him out of His disciples' sight (v. 9). He

will not neglect the theological significance of details like the cloud and the two men in white robes. He will also carefully refrain from suggesting to his hearers that Christ is absent from His world and His church after all. On the contrary, remembering that God's right hand, at which the incarnate Christ is seated, "is everywhere" (Formula of Concord, Epitome, 7, 12; Solid Declaration, 7, 95), the preacher will stress to his congregation that the whole Christ, God and man, is present in His church, in the members of His body, in the persons of His ordained servants, in the reading and proclamation of His Word, in the administration of baptism and holy absolution, and in His body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

If the preacher chooses Is. 45:18-25 as his text, he may find his greatest difficulty in reducing this miscellaneous melange, the last of a series of prophetic hymns, to a single theme. There is an embarrassing multiplicity of thrusts. They include: God depicted as the sole creator of an orderly world, designed for human habitation (v. 18); His deliberate and dependable self-disclosure (in many and various ways, Heb. 1:1 reminds us) (v. 19) that climaxed in His final and ultimate self-disclosure in His incarnate Son and Word; the courtroom scene, to which God has subpoenaed the surviving *goyim*, with its picture of the pathetic plight of the pagan, old and new (vv. 20-21); the portrayal of the utter uniqueness of Yahweh who is both *saddiq* (with all that this implies) and a rescuing liberator (*môshîa'*) (v. 21); God's irrevocable determination to subdue and to rescue all His human creatures, even those who were angry with Him and who must return to Him humiliated and ashamed (vv. 22-24); and Israel as the particular beneficiary of His glorious triumph (v. 25). The promise of the pericope is destined for eschatological fulfillment, but God has already initiated the eschaton in the incarnation, the life, the death, and the exaltation of Christ and in the holy community that is the body on earth of the Savior whose ascension we commemorate and who has taken His seat at the right hand of His Father.

Dan. 7:13-14 confronts the preacher with two problems in his preparation. It is apocalyptic, which must be understood according to its own rules. It is Aramaic, not Hebrew. The pericope must be read

in the context of the whole chapter. The revisers of the lectionary apparently chose this pericope because the "return" of the ascended Christ to His Father could be seen as analogous to the presentation of "one like a son of man to the Ancient of Days" (v. 13; on the "Ancient of Days" see the vivid picture in vv. 9-10). Those who take this route should be aware of its perils. By our Lord's time "son of man" had become a Messianic title. But it cannot simply be presumed to be that in this passage. "One like a son of man" here is just as much an apocalyptic *symbol* as the lion who lost his wings, the rib-crunching bear, the four-winged and four-headed leopard, and the destructive ten-horned talking monster of the first vision (vv. 4-8). Indeed v. 18 clearly identifies as the recipients of the eternal kingdom "the holy ones of the Most High" (qaddîshê 'elyônîn, which occurs only in vv. 18, 22, 25, and 27 of this chapter; the plural 'elyônîn is unusual, but it can be defended as a "double-plural"). The "one like a son of man" is the symbol for these "holy ones." (The view of some scholars that in the present text as we have it they are heavenly beings is based on ingenious but not persuasive arguments.) The promise of universal and eternal kingship will find its fulfillment eschatologically. The domination, glory, kingly rule, and universal sovereignty are to be given first to the incarnate Son of God. Through baptism we have been made members of His body, qaddîshê 'elyônîn, and participants in His kingly rule that shall have no end ("Nicene" Creed, quoting Luke 1:33). Our mission is to tell every human being that the ascended Christ has already conquered all the demonic powers and that He will manifest Himself as the total victor at the end of the age.

The preacher who selects Eph. 4:7-13 as his text needs to remember that the ascension here spoken of is Christ's "theological" ascension, His exaltation. He is both the ever-present incarnate Lord of His church and the God who fills the entire universe. The role of gift-giver is appropriated to Him here, as it is appropriated to the Father in Rom. 12:3-8 and to the Holy Spirit in 1 Cor. 12:1-31. Article 3 of the Augsburg Confession is eminently quotable in this connection. The citation of Ps. 68:18 follows neither the Masoretic Text nor the Septuagint; see, for instance,

the text of the psalm verse in the Revised Standard Version or the New English Bible. Exegetes still debate the meaning (and the occasion) of Ps. 68: it may possibly have been a liturgy used at the return of the Ark of the Covenant to its shrine on Mount Zion. In the Jewish community it was read on the feast of Shevuoth ("Weeks," that is, Pentecost) when the giving of the Sinaitic code was recalled, and v. 18 was applied to Moses. The analogy of Christ's victory over the demonic powers justifies the application of this verse—altered as it is from the Hebrew original—to Him. The descent "into the lower parts of the earth" (v. 9) is probably not a reference to Christ's descent into the netherworld that becomes an article of the Western baptismal creed around A. D. 400. Although exegetical opinion is not unanimous, the descent to "the lower parts of the earth" is probably best taken as a reference to our Lord's incarnation. "All the heavens" (v. 10) reflects the Jewish cosmology of the period. The author of Ephesians interprets the "gifts" of the ascended Christ to His holy community in terms of the persons who engage in the church's service to its members and to the world. The functionaries described are not easy to identify with 20th-century ecclesiastical counterparts. Authentic "apostles" existed only in the earliest church; the reconstituted Twelve were eyewitnesses of our Lord's earthly activity and of His resurrection (Acts 1:21-22), but others who did not meet these criteria bore the title (St. Paul, for instance). The institutional "prophets" probably had a place in early Christian worship, although it is not certain precisely what that role was. They had a special charisma (1 Cor. 14:1), and from time to time they disclosed things not known to others, but they seem not, at least ordinarily, to have been ecstasies. The office of "prophet" seems not to have survived the second century. The function of the "evangelist" is no less obscure; obviously we must not read 19th/20th-century meanings into it. The first century "evangelist" was neither a Billy Sunday nor a Billy Graham. "Pastors and teachers"—the term is probably a hendiadys to describe a single office—exercise the function that we can most easily identify, although we should take pause from the fact that this is the only place in the New Testament where

poinmên designates a human ecclesiastical functionary. Preparation for preaching on this text should include a careful and reflective rereading of the articles on these terms in the *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament* in German or English.

Both "saints" and "ministry" (v. 12) in our English versions are infelicitous archaizing translations that have often become mischievously misleading sloganistic jargon. Hagioi designates those who have become members of God's holy people by baptism and faith. Diakonia is simply the manifold "service" to which God calls all His people. The three inter-related purposes (each introduced with eis) for which Christ gave these personal gifts to His community find excellent expression in v. 13: (1) the unity (a term that occurs in New Testament Greek only here and in v. 3) inherent in our faith and in our knowledge of the incarnate Son of God, to adapt the New English Bible translation; (2) a mature humanness; and (3) the Christian stature that takes the unattainable fullness of Christ as its impossible criterion, and that by the same token in its demand for lifelong growth through the Holy Spirit leaves no room for smugness, complacency, or a too comfortable sense of ever having arrived.

Where the Holy Gospel of the new lectionary, Matt. 28:16-20, belongs in the chronology of the post-Easter appearances of our Lord is debatable. It is the only post-Easter appearance in the First Gospel. It can be linked with the ascension only because it concludes that document. None of the other gospels have this pericope. The angelic logion of Mark 16:7, commanding the disciples to go to Galilee, is reinforced in Matt. 28:10 with a command of the risen Jesus Himself. Galilee obviously fascinated the compiler of the First Gospel. The "mountain" (v. 16) is as unidentifiable as the mountain where Jesus was tempted, or the mountain where He preached the "Sermon on the Mount," or the mountain where He was transfigured. "When they saw Him" (v. 17) reminds us that in the First Gospel this is the first time that any of His male disciples had seen the risen Lord. "Some doubted" is the conventional translation ever since the Vulgate. Diastazô has various meanings, "to doubt, to disbelieve, to be uncertain,

to hesitate."⁴ The "hoi de" has worried commentators for centuries and has driven some to desperate expedients. But the article "hoi" need not necessarily mean "some"; it could mean "they." In any case, 20th-century congregations may be grateful for an example of devout worship in the face of subjective doubt and hesitation in the circle of the Eleven themselves. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me" (v. 18) recalls that the Formula of Concord (Epitome 8, 16. 34. 39 [note the reference to the ascension here]; Solid Declaration, 8, 43. 55. 70. 85), following an astonishingly consistent consensus of the fathers (see the Catalog of Testimonies at the end of the Book of Concord, *Bekennnisschriften*, pp. 1103—1135), operates with the principle that the divine prerogatives given to our Lord in time (such as the totality of authority in heaven and on earth here) are given not to His Godhead but to His humanity. It is comforting to realize that the wielder of cosmic power is our Brother, one of us, bone of our bones, flesh of our flesh, tempted in everything like us, except that He was without sin. "Make disciples" (v. 19) is a command for the disciples (v. 16) to reproduce themselves. Note that the imperative is in the mathêteusate and that "go" reproduces a participle. "All nations" reflects the utterly inclusive scope of Christ's saving work. Our evangelistic approach in Key 73 dare not be the old question "Are you saved?" It must be the indicative proclamation "Christ has saved you." "Baptizing" (v. 19) reminds us that the objective of our evangelistic approach is not to secure a confession of faith in Jesus, but to bring the unbaptized to the washing of rebirth and therewith to membership in Christ's body. Here is a radical difference between churches with a sacramental tradition, like the Church of the Augsburg Confession, and those who see Christianity as involving merely an intellectual assent or an emotional commitment. We must not obscure this radical difference. Human beings become Christians by being baptized. Apropos of the formula "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," many

⁴ My colleague, Professor Frederick W. Danker, has called my attention to the significant parallels in 4:28-33.

modern exegetes see it at least as unlikely that our Lord commanded the use of the Trinitarian formula and hold that the First Gospel reflects the practice that had developed by the time the document was compiled (between A. D. 68 and 90, presumably). In spite of Acts 2:38; 10:48; and 19:5—on which “Oneness” (or “Jesus Only”) Pentecostals lay such stress—and in spite of Eusebius’ substitution of “in My name” for the second half of the verse beginning “baptizing them,” this assumption of a postdominical origin for the Trinitarian formula does not seem absolutely necessary. In any case, the text itself (apart from the Eusebius passage) exhibits no uncertainty, and we cannot dispense ourselves or others from using the Trinitarian formula. “Teaching” reminds us that the task of the church includes instructing (*didaskontes*) each generation of new Christians in the observance (*têrein*) of everything that Christ commanded (*eneteilamên*) His disciples. Our Lutheran sensitivity to the polarity of the Law and the Gospel (as we Lutherans understand these terms) should not be allowed to lead us to play down the implications of this verb. “I am with you” (v. 20) are the words of the Jesus who finally “fulfills” the Immanuel (“God is with us”) prophecy. The Holy Spirit that He imparts is not the present surrogate and vicar of an absent Lord. On the contrary, the incarnate Word Himself is present in and with and under His holy community in every generation and amid every vicissitude, for He has ascended to His Father’s side and has taken His place of power at His Father’s right hand.

Arthur Carl Piepkorn

PENTECOST (Whitsunday)

Old Testament Lesson

Joel 2:28-29 (Hebrew, Joel 3:1-2)

Form

Chapter 1:1–2:17 is a typical “judgment against the nation” form. There is repetition in the call for cultic worship of 2:1 and 2:15. Following the second call the “hope” segment begins.

Background

Most scholars agree that the Book of Joel is probably postexilic. The community is small enough to live within trumpet call

of the temple (1:14; 2:1), and the temple is that of Ezekiel 6:13-18, completed in 514–515 B. C. The Fall of Jerusalem is referred to as a memory, and the Greeks are mentioned only in passing, indicating Alexander’s conquest is yet to come. This would date the book about 400–350 B. C. in the small postexilic Jewish community gathered around the temple and the Torah. (See Bright, *History of Israel*; Brown, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*; von Rad, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2; and Denzer, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Joel*.)

Major theological interest

Joel reflects a high degree of Jewish postexilic eschatology in his description of the Day of Yahweh. He uses the plague of locusts in chapter 1 as a type for the armies of Yahweh in attack on the city of Jerusalem. As in all “Day of Yahweh” prophecies, there is both judgment and promise attached. It is Yahweh’s judgment on His people that brings the destruction, but in the call for cultic assembly in 1:13-14 and 2:15-17 there is the hope that Yahweh who is judge will also deliver His people. It is in this setting of Yahweh’s judgment and promise that the pericope is set. Beginning with 2:18 one detects the usual prophetic switch from judgment to promise (Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*). The pericope then is part of the *promissio* segment.

Word study

Ruach, Spirit. In preexilic Israel, the double meaning of breath-wind-Spirit is common. God breathes the *ruach* of life on Adam and Eve. The *ruach* Yahweh is seen as an indeterminable but present activity of God for His people. Later on (Ezekiel and Jeremiah, Isaiah) the *ruach* is especially associated with prophetic speech, ecstatic or otherwise. This later usage is employed by Joel.

Nb', prophesy; *chalomoth*, dreams; *chazon*, visions—all these are activities of Yahweh that describe a method of direct communication to His people. Only a chosen few become prophets and seers and are normally called when “the Word of Yahweh” comes to them and anoints them in some way. (See Jeremiah 1 and Isaiah 6.) Yahweh uses these activities to speak His will and His mind to His people.

Implications

This pericope is a statement of eschatological hope that is typical in postexilic Judaism. It is a message of the good that will come to the faithful after the Day of Yahweh. The power of prophetic utterance, that is, the ability to speak and hear the words of Yahweh directly, will be given to all people of Judah regardless of age, sex, or social standing. This will be done when Yahweh pours out His (*ruach*) Spirit on all flesh (the community of Yahweh around the temple). This Spirit is seen as that power that will put man in contact directly with Yahweh. This Spirit will be poured out on all who in all times stake their lives and put their trust in Yahweh. All enemies will be scattered, and the Lord will reign over His people.

Homiletical suggestions

Speaking with Authority for God

Introduction

What was a prophet? Not simply a person who had a mysterious power of predicting future events, not a kind of fortune-teller or crystal-ball-gazer, but something much better. In the highest sense of the word, a prophet was a person who could tell the people about God's purposes at first hand, because he knew God for himself and could hear God's speaking to him. In ancient Israel the common run of people did not expect to be able for themselves to enter into those mysteries. They were content to believe what they were taught. But sometimes there would appear a person who was obviously meant to be a spokesman for God. Somehow the Spirit of God was upon him. He was able to tell other people about God's mind and will. This person could only be one in a thousand, one in a generation, a special friend of God, a prophet.

Joel. The prophet declares that the day will come when all God's people will be prophets and that He will put His Spirit on every one of them. Predictions often prove quite wrong, for, as Chesterton says, history is very fond of playing the game of "Cheat the prophet." But Joel was convinced that the thing was going to happen. How risky it must have sounded! To talk of ordinary people having God's Spirit just as truly as the prophets. How unlikely!

St. Peter. Four hundred years later a man

stands up and announces that what Joel had predicted had now actually come true. That Day of Pentecost some remarkable things happened. A large number of rather ordinary people had been united in a new and wonderful fellowship because a new and supernatural power had come into their lives. It was no mere passing excitement. Some onlookers scoffed, but Saint Peter knew better, and he spoke out with authority. This was the work of God. What had happened to these people was that God had spoken to them in judgment and in promise through His Son whom the Jewish leaders had executed and whom God had raised on the third day. God's Spirit had opened their minds and hearts to this message and had given their life a new meaning and a new purpose. Until now they had taken their religion for granted, as a venerable custom and a way of life. But now it is different. Now they have a faith of their own. They have been made able to place their complete trust in Yahweh's promise delivered through Jesus Christ. Yahweh is pouring on them His Spirit, the same Spirit that worked in Joel. So they too can speak authoritative words from Yahweh. To all who put their trust in the mercy of Yahweh, mercy made clear in Jesus Christ, Yahweh will continue to pour out His Spirit, regardless of race, sex, social standing, or age. They were prepared to go anywhere, in spite of danger, to speak with authority about what they believed. St. Peter stands up and says: "It has come true at last. This is what the prophet Joel had predicted."

Today. Is all of this as true of our generation as it has been of past generations? Is it happening today? We can be certain that it is. Wherever the judgment and the mercy of God are proclaimed, it *is* happening. It is happening in quite new ways in Africa and India, in Oriental tongues and Hispanic languages. It is happening in our lands too. The rapid growth of the Pentecostal movement in our day must be examined for its witness to the fact that people of all ages and classes can still dream dreams and see visions. But most of all we should realize that Christians can speak (prophecy) with authority for God. They can declare His wonders, for by the activity of His Spirit they have heard Him speak to them in judgment and in mercy in the promise of Jesus Christ.

There is another question: What about us? What about our congregations? Have we in our midst the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, uniting us at the deepest level? Are the words of Joel and St. Peter applicable to our situation? (Here the unique situation of the hearers can be explored to advantage in answering the question.) God has promised to pour out His Spirit on us. Now it becomes the preacher's task to preach the Word of judgment and promise that the Spirit uses to work His work in the hearer. This Word is not only information; it is not merely good news. It becomes the tool by which the Spirit moves us to be reconciled to God. The Spirit testifies that the wrath of God for sin is removed by His love offered in the sacrifice of Christ. The Spirit urges us to trust that Christ and to build our hope and our confidence on the sure foundation of God's promise in Christ.

The marvel of it all is that on this Pentecost, too, the prophecy of Joel comes true for every one of us. God has poured out His Spirit on each one of us. Each one of us participates in the miracle of that first Pentecost. We ordinary people have been anointed boldly to confess the reason for the hope that is within us. We discover that we are prophets who are enabled to speak with authority for God and proclaim firsthand what the will and the purpose of God is in our lives.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Amen.

PENTECOST, FIRST AFTER (Feast of the Holy Trinity)

Old Testament Lesson—Isaiah 6:1-8

Form

This is a form of call discourse (compare Jer. 1:1 ff.) with strong cultic overtones. It is possible that the seraphic cry is liturgical and was a piece of the temple liturgy.

Background

Uzziah (783–742), Jotham (742–735), Ahaz (735–715). Other referents: Fall of Samaria (Northern Kingdom) to Sargon II of Assyria, 721 B. C. (See Bright, *History of Israel*.)

Uzziah came to the throne of Judah at the age of 16 and is given a very positive rating by the Biblical historians (2 Chron.

26:9 ff.). He is credited with the rebuilding of Jerusalem's defenses; he refitted and reorganized the army and brought in the use of siege engines. The Negeb and Southern Desert were firmly under his control as was the Philistine Plain area. Late in his reign he was stricken with leprosy, and he remained on the throne while his son Jotham was regent. This was a time of great prosperity for the land of Israel and Judah. They together held almost the total of the ancient Solomonic lands. It was a high point in the history of the Divided Kingdoms.

In 745 Tiglath-Pileser III came to the throne of Assyria and initiated an aggressive military policy against his neighbors. His records show that in 743 he opposed a western coalition of tribes headed by one Azriah of Yaudi. This is probably Uzziah of Judah. He won, and this was the beginning of a downhill road for the Judaeans.

Judah became involved with the Assyrians and slowly but surely lost all her territories and a great deal of her prosperity as the greater strength of the Assyrians prevailed. Under Jotham, Judah became a satellite of Assyria, and under Ahaz this continued, although Ahaz had definite plans for rebellion, many of which were discussed by Isaiah. During Ahaz' reign Israel was alternately pious and syncretistic. Ahaz led Judah to more and more apostasy, followed by reliance on foreign alliances, which signaled the end of trust in Yahweh. It is to this situation that Isaiah speaks, especially in the "Emmanuel" passages of chapter 7 and following. This was the beginning of the end for Judah too. In 721 Samaria fell. It would be a relatively short time until Babylon leveled Jerusalem in 587. This, then, is the context of the call of Isaiah, and Isaiah's call to Israel, a call to trust in the God of their fathers and to do justice and mercy.

Word Study

Hekal—"Temple Sanctuary," translated temple in RSV and sanctuary in the Jerusalem Bible. This is a specific cultic term used in reference to the sanctuary area of the Solomonic temple. It then refers to that area reserved for the men of Israel and, in the reference to come, specifically to the Holy of Holies, where the throne of Yahweh is set amid the six-winged seraphim. Later references to the smoke that filled the temple (*Beth*) refer to the entire

temple environs, probably not only the localized center.

Seraphim—popular ancient Near Eastern creatures, part man and part beast which in ancient Near Eastern cultic circles were used to signify the power and majesty of the god. Assur and Marduk are also portrayed with these creatures. The imagery is to portray the awesome majesty of Yahweh. They were also part of the decor in the Holy of Holies.

The Trisagion is the Hebrew way of saying most holy. Reading a Trinitarian reference into this may be a pious act, but it is not supported by the internal evidence.

Sabaoth—is from the root, *saba'*, which means "to wage war." It is often used in the Old Testament and is primarily army imagery. In Deuteronomy there are a number of cultic passages dealing with the "host of heaven" whom the Israelites are specifically told not to worship, as was the practice of many Near Eastern peoples. In First Samuel (1 Sam. 1:3; 15:2; 17:45; 6:2; 18:7, and so forth) the name Yahweh Sabaoth seems to be extremely cultic and technical in nature. The Ark in battle always bears with it the freight that the God who is with it, fighting His people's battles and leading them, is Yahweh Sabaoth—the Warrior Yahweh. It is important to notice here that when Isaiah sees his visions, it is in the temple, and it is the Holy of Holies that sets the scene. Obviously, in the Holy of Holies one finds the Ark. Psalm 24 shows the common usage. It is an entrance hymn to the sanctuary, using the traditional wording of the ascent up the hill, the holy place. The liturgical refrain continuously emphasizes that Yahweh is strong and mighty, mighty in battle, king of glory. This theme is echoed again in terms of the Ark sanctuary in Psalms 46, 69, 80, 84, 103. The evidence strongly suggests that this is a cultic term intimately related to the Ark and the sanctuary and used frequently in the liturgical worship of the temple. Yahweh Sabaoth is thus a *terminus technicus*, and it is in fact for this reason that it could be left untranslated.

Awon means that guilt is taken away. This is a strong term meaning liability for punishment. The phrase "sin is covered" stresses the sacrificial action that covers sin (definite blood imagery).

Implications

Isaiah is confronted with the awesome

majesty of God, Yahweh Sabaoth. Isaiah is overwhelmed by his own unworthiness at seeing Yahweh in His "raw" glory. Isaiah recognizes that he is an unclean man who merits nothing. God graciously cleanses Isaiah of his sin and calls for a messenger. Isaiah, now bold before even Yahweh, volunteers, and then he goes out and proclaims judgment to Judah, because they will not trust Yahweh.

Homiletical suggestions

God's Action in Christ is Directed by the Holy Spirit Towards the Sanctification (Holiness) of Life.

This lesson, with its dramatic picture of the activity of heavenly worship, will be read to a congregation actively involved in worship. The occasion is the Feast of the Holy Trinity. While this passage cannot be employed as a "proof text" for the doctrine of the Trinity, its worship theme certainly provides warrant for making Trinitarian worship the focus of the sermon. Christian worship accents God's almighty action of deliverance in Christ and is directed by the Holy Spirit towards the sanctification (holiness) of life. The two accents of the text (Holy, Holy, Holy and Yahweh Sabaoth) signal the goal—holiness of worship and holiness of life—and the means—the warrior God who delivers.

One of the great purposes of worship is "to renew" us for the tasks of Christian living. A mark of authentic worship is its ability to call us to holiness of life—a life so lived that it gives glory to God.

As with Isaiah, the closer we come to participation in this kind of worship the more conscious we become of that "sinfulness" which dilutes and destroys "God's power for holy living." Confronted with God's demand for holiness and our unholiness, we hear the call to contrition and repentance, and recognize the part they must play in our response to God.

But we plead in faith because our eyes have seen the King, Yahweh Sabaoth. He is the mighty warrior who has defeated and routed our enemies. In Jesus Christ, God the Father's deliverance is sure and certain. Jesus Christ takes away the guilt/liability (v. 7a) that is rightly ours for not living in holiness of life, and the blood imagery of v. 7b (sin is covered) stresses the sacrificial action that covers sin. This "vision" of worship is reinforced for us, as it was for Isaiah, by the sign of the cove-

nant. We celebrate this anew today—the Holy Communion, the blood of the new covenant shed for us for the remission of sins, for life, and for salvation.

The life of worship moves between two poles: It is redemptive—it reveals our natural sinful life and redeems it; and that redemption becomes the power God's Spirit uses to direct us to our true calling, "to live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness."

We worship a God who stands over against us in holiness, yet works within us by the living pressure of His grace. And the final outcome of that experience (which is a part of worship) is the call to live justly and practice mercy, to do those things that glorify God indeed. It is the power of this good news that moves us to adore God and worship Him. "To worship well is to live well."

John S. Damm

PENTECOST, SECOND AFTER

Old Testament: Exodus 20:1-17

Epistle: 1 John 3:11-18

Gospel: Luke 16:19-31

Preachers who follow the liturgical calendar are familiar with the Pentecost season's emphasis on the Christian's growth in faith and works. The pericopes for Pentecost II exhibit a striking uniformity in their insistence on the need for faith to bring forth fruit. "Love must not be a matter of words or talk; it must be genuine and show itself in action (Epistle)." The lessons all point to the general theme, *Love Is Action!*

Exodus 20:1-17 is the Ten Commandments. Here is straight law, in all its starkness and simplicity. People who have been called into God's covenant relationship are under obligation to obey.

1 John 3:11-18 (the text) reminds us that it is characteristic of the world to hate, but Christians are distinguished from pagans by their love. Love is the infallible evidence of true piety and the badge of discipleship. St. John introduces Cain as an example of the worldly hatred that results from a heart at war with God and itself. Since the sacrifices of Cain and Abel were externally similar (Gen. 4), the text hints that the hidden motives of the heart are judged by God as well as are our deeds (or lack of them). In the context of Pentecost

II, Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a haunting summary of all the pericopes and may well serve as a sermon topic. The real test of love is the willingness to sacrifice one's life for one's neighbor. Jesus Christ is the example for such a transformed life style and its source of strength. But St. John knows that Christians are seldom called upon for such heroic feats of love. He suggests that more frequently a man will be called upon to help "a brother in need," at which point he dare not "shut up his heart against him." Parallel textual emphases may be utilized from James, the Sermon on the Mount, or an Old Testament prophet, possibly Amos.

The Gospel is St. Luke 16:19-31, the account of the rich man and Lazarus. An obvious relationship between this pericope and the other lessons is apparent. However, this lesson holds in it the sobering reminder that it was not wealth which condemned Dives, nor was it poverty which commended Lazarus to God's mercy. The conclusion of the Gospel stresses the fact that one's relationship to the Word of God is of paramount importance. Because the rich man rejected God's Word, he also rejected the poor.

The three remaining propers contain Gospel material that is not too readily apparent in the lessons. The Introit sings of the Lord who deals bountifully with us, who rejoice in His salvation. The Collect acknowledges our weakness in doing good deeds, and asks for God's help to please Him "in will and deed." The Gradual likewise admits to our human frailty, but it returns to the theme, "Blessed is he that considereth the poor."

Love Is Action!

Introduction. A balanced theology

A. Many sincere and devout believers are understandably suspicious of this theme, for the Gospel has often been abused in the name of radical revolutionary movements, "social action" programs, and disruptive activities designed to change society. Admittedly the Gospel has been abused in the interests of social causes.

B. But in our reaction to such abuses there is the danger that we lose sight of clear statements of Scripture to love the stranger, visit the sick, feed the hungry, and help the

poor. Today's lessons serve as a corrective to the equally extremist position that God is interested only in souls and faith, not in bodies and works. It is a call to a balanced theology.

I. A healthy faith is active in deeds of love.

- A. Jesus Christ is our source of power and our example. "Christ laid down His life for us, and we in turn are bound to lay down our lives for our brothers." Christ came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many. The sacrifice of life includes more than (or less than) physical death, but it involves sacrificial living.
- B. Faith is internal but exhibits itself externally. "By my deeds I will prove to you my faith" (James 2:18). A man who fails to love is still in death (1 John 3:15). A definition of love is found in 1 Cor. 13. The arena of love falls into concentric circles: family, fellow believers, neighbors, community, world.
- C. The poor are a special object of God's care. They are called "blessed." This includes the economically deprived, those suffering from oppression, widows, orphans, and all in need of help.
- D. Faith active in love is a personal activity. The text speaks only of individuals. Though charity can effectively be administered through institutions (orphanages, homes for aged, programs) God is concerned primarily with the disposition of the heart of the individual. It is possible for us to contribute to welfare institutions without ever experiencing a true change of heart to love the poor.

II. Despite our failures, God forgives.

- A. The proper acknowledge our failures to permit faith to show itself in deeds of love. Instead of assuming a defensive posture by adding up our good deeds, we confess in the Gradual, "I have sinned against Thee." The Introit is a reminder to "rejoice in Thy salvation."
- B. Salvation has been given us through the Word. The rich man could have known its richness through Moses

and the prophets. We know it—are changed by it—through the Word made flesh. He became poor for us that we might be rich—in forgiveness, life and salvation.

- C. The forgiven sinner goes from absolution to work.

PENTECOST, THIRD AFTER

Old Testament Lesson: Deut. 8:11-20

Epistle: Revelation 3:14-22

Gospel: Luke 14:24

The theme that appears in all three lessons is a warning against treating God's presence, His reality, and His Word with indifference because of its familiarity and our own self-satisfied attitudes toward our own successes.

Deut. 8:11-20 is a warning to the Israelites not to forget their humble origins after they have risen to heights of prosperity through God's blessing. "Do not become proud and forget the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt" (8:14). Worse than mere forgetfulness is the notion that Israel's success has been due to its own efforts, so that forgetfulness results in pride. God warns that such pride will most certainly result in Israel's destruction.

Rev. 3:14-22 (the text) is the familiar letter to the church at Laodicea which has striking parallels to the Old Testament lesson. God warns them against the pride that says, "How well I have done. I have everything I want" (3:17), a pride that results in forgetting God, the source of all their blessings. St. John faults his readers with poverty in the very things of which they were proud. Laodicea was prominent for its wealth as a banking capital; it was a center of healing arts for ailments of the eyes and ears; and it was a manufacturing center for woolen garments. Despite these three areas of prominence, St. John says his readers are "poor, blind, and naked." They are poor rich people. But their condition is not hopeless. Again using the triad as above, Christ offers this counsel: "Buy of me gold . . . be clothed in white garments . . . see."

The most familiar description of the Laodiceans is their lukewarm attitude, neither hot nor cold. The comparison does not identify fervent souls with "hot" and those who are completely without Christ as "cold." Christ says, "I would that you

were cold!" The point of comparison seems to be that liquids are most potable when either hot or cold, but nauseating when neither hot or cold. The contrast is simply between a condition of spiritual tepidity and one that is acceptable (hot or cold) and satisfying. The reason for their spiritual state is the pride and self-complacency that often accompanies material wealth.

The Gospel is contained in the beautiful and familiar invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" (3:20). Christ promises to come in and sup with those who answer His summons, an obvious Eucharistic image, concluding with a promise of ultimate victory.

Luke 14:15-24 is the account of the dinner invitation rejected by four groups of people offering their several excuses. The householder rejected their excuses and filled his hall with the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. The account is a warning to the proud and indifferent, but it is a word of Good News to the outcasts.

The Introit acknowledges the Lord to be the source of all blessings. He is my Stay, He brought me into a large place, He is my Rock and Fortress. This is a wholesome corrective to the self-centered pride warned against in the lessons.

The Collect likewise confesses God to be the author of genuine fear and love, and asks that our love remain steadfast.

The Gradual reminds us of the Old Testament lesson in speaking of God's deliverance from distress and ends on a note of solemn warning for the "righteous."

Lukewarm Christians

I. From Zeal to Indifference

- A. It was material wealth, not familiarity with the Gospel, which caused the church to lose its fervency. Wealth led to self-sufficiency and pride. The basic sin of the church was the same as it is today, the loss of an awareness of our total dependence on God for everything, believing that our success and accomplishments are somehow related to our skills, programs, and morality.
- B. The resulting indifference was manifested by spiritual poverty, blindness, and nakedness. Deut. 8:11 ff. and Luke 14:15 ff. reveal

the same situation in which people who have grown in material security no longer need or heed God's Law or Gospel. Contemporary spiritual poverty may reveal itself in many ways: warped priorities, lovelessness, self-aggrandizement, the maintenance of outmoded institutions, lack of discipline, legalism.

II. Judged by Christ

- A. Christ, the Judge, is referred to as the "Amen" (faithful and true witness) and as the primary source of all creation. This description underscores the foolishness of believing that anything belongs to us. The creator and dispenser of everything will be the judge of our attitude and use of material goods.
- B. All three lessons are a call to repentance. "Be on your mettle therefore and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Repentance may be facilitated by God's reproof, for whom He loves He reproves and disciplines (Rev. 3:19), perhaps through the loss of material goods or through a dramatic revelation of our own moral weakness. The prophets speak of man being in distress and requiring deliverance, possibly an allusion to such God-given discipline. The purpose of such chastisement is to turn the believer back to being hot or cold, and it is sent in love (3:19).

III. A Welcome Promise

- A. Of Reconciliation: "I stand at the door and knock" (3:20). The imagery is one of sharing a meal, which has always been a symbol of fellowship, reconciliation, and mutual trust. Lukewarm Christians need not despair. God still loves them and invites them to His table, which includes the Eucharist. The Gospel for the day also uses the image of a celestial banquet as a sign of salvation.
- B. Of Victory: a victory which is associated with Christ's own victory. The heady prospect of actually sharing Christ's throne is held out to the believer (3:22). The sermon (and text) begins with a general condemnation, moves to-

ward the dread prospect of loving discipline, but concludes with a warm and inviting offer of forgiveness and victory.

Carl Volz

PENTECOST, EIGHTH AFTER

Old Testament	Exodus 16:2-3, 11-18
Epistle	Acts 2:38-47
Gospel	John 6:1-14

I. Who Cares? He Cares!

The key to an understanding of this Sunday's ILCW selections is contained in the Collect: "O God, whose never-failing providence ordereth all things in heaven and in earth. . . ." It is God who provides for the needs of His people. They respond in awe and praise. The response in the Introit is from the forty-seventh psalm: "Oh, clap your hands all ye people: Shout unto God with the voice of triumph." Such a response is called for when God's rulership of all people and nations is seen. In the Gradual the same response occurs when God's children learn to be in awe of the Lord. No such response is recorded from the children of Israel as God provided for their need in the wilderness. Their first response to the hunger they felt was that of complaint. Exodus 16 records that they murmured against a God who would bring them out into the wilderness to starve. They needed not only food, they also needed trust. God was trustworthy. "At twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God." (Verse 12)

The God who spoke and acted through Moses to provide for His people later spoke and acted through His Son, as the Gospel of John records. The crowd that followed Jesus was in need of food. It was the disciples who were in need of trust this time. Philip did not know how the people would be fed. Jesus knew. He fed the crowd of at least five thousand with five barley loaves and two small fish. The response of the people to this sign was, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." But this response was inadequate. Jesus later noted that they sought Him because of the bread that filled their bodies while neglecting their need for Him, the Bread of Life, the bread that never

perishes. This reflects the fact that men do not always realize the extent of their need. They may, in fact, settle for much less or, even worse, for that which is harmful. So the latter part of the Collect says, "we humbly beseech Thee to put away from us all hurtful things and give us those things which be profitable for us."

The people of Israel, in fact, not only failed to realize what they needed but rejected the One they needed. They crucified Him. This was not only hurtful but downright damnable. Peter let them know about it in no uncertain terms on the day of Pentecost. When their need became apparent to them, the people of Israel asked what they should do. "You must repent," Peter answered, "and every one of you must be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). God had provided for their need through the very one they had crucified. Three thousand responded with acceptance and baptism that day. But that was not the end of it. God continued to make provision for the need of His people for both faith and food. This He did through a fellowship that taught, celebrated, prayed, and shared with anyone in need. The members of the fellowship not only responded to God's provision for them by being His providers for others, but they did it gladly and generously as they praised God.

II. He Cares Through a Community.

The section of Acts 2 from which the Epistle is taken has two units of thought. Verses 37-41 comprise one unit, which speaks of the results of the Pentecost experience and message. Verses 42-47 speak of the early Christian community. The latter unit is selected as text for the sermon because of its parallels with the Old Testament and Gospel selections.

Verse 42. Four characteristics of the early Christian community are given here. The first was a continuance of the teaching of the apostles. At this time the teaching was comprised of personal recollections of Jesus and His teaching by those who had been with Him. Only later would a fixed body of teaching be agreed upon as Paul, for instance, seems to indicate in Romans 6:17 and 2 Timothy 1:13. The second characteristic was that of fellowship. This *koinonia* was similar to groups known in

the Aramaic as *habbura*, groups which shared a common life. This especially applied to those who united to celebrate a common Passover meal. The word *koinonia* sometimes has the sense of "alms-giving" or "relief" (cf. Romans 15:26, a "contribution" for the poor), and the early Christian fellowship did practice the sharing of goods with those in need. They also recognized that the need of the Christian family was greater than that of any individual.

A third characteristic was that of the breaking of bread. This breaking of bread was more than a common meal. It follows closely on *koinonia*, a word used to describe the relation between bread and body, wine and blood in 1 Corinthians 10:16. Yet it seemed to take place within the context of a common meal, since verse 46 (which is similar to 42 and may be a doublet) has the breaking of bread and partaking of food in close connection with each other. It was only later that the Eucharist was separated from the *agape* meal. It was probably at this meal that the poorer members received their sustenance. The exact phrase "breaking of bread" occurs only here and in Luke 24:30, but the verbal phrase "to break bread" occurs also in Luke 24:30, Acts 20:7-11; 27:35; and in connection with the feeding of the multitude and the institution of the Lord's Supper.

The final thing characteristic of the Christian community was its prayers. This is a reference to the gatherings for prayer in the homes of the members of the community. Their public worship at this time was still at the temple. But the distinctive worship of the Christian community was in the prayers and devotions conducted in the homes. (Cf. Acts 4:23-30)

Verse 43. The word "fear" (*phobos*) may seem out of place here as a reaction to the wonders and signs done by the apostles. The NEB supplies a helpful translation, "The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone."

Verses 44-45. The early Christian community had a high level of commitment to each other and the need of the brother or sister. The sharing of goods made a communal life possible. The imperfect tense of "sell" indicates an ongoing selling of property and goods as need arose. This would seem to indicate a modified com-

munal existence rather than a total one.

Verses 46-47. The "breaking of bread" is contrasted to attendance at the temple. Temple attendance would mark them as loyal Jews. The distinctively Christian worship in "breaking of bread" and "prayers" would take place in members' homes. They shared food gladly and generously and praised God. Everyone was impressed. The Lord continued to provide for persons by adding them to this community in which His providers met each other's needs.

A Care-ismatic Community

Introduction: Many are convinced no one cares, God least of all. Population pressures push people together and make them want distance. Like ants, human populations crowd together and scurry about. Many feel that God throws a few crumbs to the ant colony once in a while, crunches it at times, ignores it most of the time. People have needs: the need to be related to a God who cares for body and spirit and the need to be related in a care-full way to other persons in a caring community.

I. Who Cares?

- A. Need of persons apparent when starving. Children of Israel in wilderness, people in Gospel reading, instances today in New Guinea, urban areas. Many convinced no one cares. We have institutionalized poverty to the extent that people are trapped in it, yet it is assumed that they have been adequately helped.
- B. Another need not so apparent. Need to be related in trusting way to a God who cares. Israel complained. People rejected and crucified Jesus. Not to be related to God who cares is to be one's own god who cares for no one and for whom no one cares.

II. He Cared!

- A. Through Christ. He cared enough to send the very best. He was deeply involved in our human existence. He was the Bread of Life broken for the healing and wholeness of all men.
- B. In Christ He cared for body and spirit. In the Gospel reading He cared enough to provide bread but

also wanted them to have the Bread that never perishes.

III. *We Care in a Care-ismatic Community.*

A. Caring for the spirit of men in a fellowship (*koinonia*) that continues in the teaching of the apostles, in the renewal of the presence of the God who cares through celebration of the Eucharist, and through public and private prayer. We respond to God in praise.

B. Caring for the body in a fellowship that shares food, goods and possessions for all in need. Respond with glad and generous hearts.

Conclusion: A Care-ismatic community is one in which people care for each other in spirit and body because of a God who cared and cares.

Robert Conrad